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ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that limited-English-proficient (LEP) students are among those most likely to drop out of school. Inconsistencies in defining dropouts and limited research affect estimates of LEP dropouts. Factors increasing the dropout risk include: low level of English language competence; large school size; lower expectations of certain ethnic and minority groups; inappropriate social behavior in class; personal reasons; and residential mobility. While the effects of dropping out of school are not fully understood, they appear to be substantial, including reduced earnings, limited employment opportunities, loss of psychological well-being; and resulting societal burden. Public dissatisfaction with public education has led to a school reform movement focusing on increasing academic rigor for students and upgrading standards for teachers. Federal and state governments have responded to the dropout problem with various approaches and initiatives. The most important element in a dropout prevention program is identification of at-risk students. Research has revealed significant risk factors. Students drop out most frequently in high school, but intervention is warranted as soon as predictors identify students as being at risk. Dropout prevention program strategies include counseling, incentive and tutorial, work-related, and alternative curriculum approaches. A number of programs illustrate the ways in which strategies can be integrated. (MSE)

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Limited English Proficient Students At Risk: Issues and Prevention Strategies

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In a recent report on American public schools, Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos noted a rise in the national dropout rates for 1988. As a new decade begins, there is an increasing awareness that a more skilled work force is needed if the U.S. is to remain economically competitive. One way to produce such a workforce is by increasing the graduation rate of high school students. To accomplish this, effective dropout prevention programs must be developed to determine the factors that identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school. One such risk factor is limitation in students' English proficiency. Indirect evidence suggests that limited English proficient (LEP) students are often among those most likely to drop out of school. However, accurate identification of LEP students is a major problem. Research done thus far on the identification of risk factors has not directly addressed this issue.

Who is an LEP Student?

When conducting studies, researchers group students according to different criteria. One classification system depends on the language that is spoken in the student's home. A *language minority* student comes from a home where a language other than English is used. Another classification system often used refers to ethnic group membership. Members of ethnic groups often use a language other than English, but not all members of a given group will necessarily speak this language. For example, a Polish-American student belongs to an identifiable ethnic group. However, such a student does not necessarily speak the Polish language. Home language usage or ethnic membership do not necessarily relate to a student's linguistic competency in either English or another language. These sociological groupings are widely used by researchers in part because they are categorical: for example, a student either does or does not belong to the category of students whose home language is Chinese or to the ethnic category of Chinese Americans.

An important defining characteristic of LEP students is a limitation in their proficiency in English. Proficiency is a *linguistic measure* and requires the use of some language assessment instrument. Proficiency in English requires reference to a continuum ranging from "no English" to "native-like proficiency in English." The level of proficiency in English cannot be necessarily related to sociological facts such as home language use or ethnicity.

Who Is a Dropout?

The term "student dropout" is often defined as "a pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another school" (OERI, 1987). A dropout is not synonymous with a student who is at risk of dropping out of school. Slavin and Madden (1989) describe a student at risk as one "who is in danger of failing to complete his or her education with an adequate level of skills."

Steinberg, et al. (1984) advise that reported dropout rates should be taken as rough estimates because official statistics may not accurately represent dropout rates by not including students who drop out before high school or by including students with sporadic attendance who, in effect, have left school. The following are other factors that complicate the identification of dropouts:

- Some students stop attending school for a period of time and then return, often resulting in grade retention. Sometimes such students are counted as dropouts because they do not graduate with their classmates.
- Some students stop attending high school but subsequently return to and complete a GED program. These students are sometimes not considered dropouts.

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- School districts use different grade-levels for their baseline population identification or have different time periods for counting unexplained absences.

As Valdivieso (1986) points out, "...dropout figures from different localities often cannot be compared with each other because of differences in how dropouts are defined or how the data are collected."

Hammack (1987) concluded that there was no standard definition of school dropout throughout the school systems he studied and that comparisons across school districts had to be made very carefully. These inconsistencies in defining dropout affect the estimates of dropouts among LEP students. Valdivieso (1986) suggests that the only claim that one might make about dropout rates (for Hispanics) is that regardless of method or definition used, the rates for Hispanics are high and usually the highest for any group in many localities. Steinberg, et al. (1984) claim that the same can also be said for American Indian students. The same might be said for LEP students in general, although this remains to be shown statistically.

How Many Dropouts Are There?

According to a U.S. Census Bureau estimate, in 1986 682,000 American teenagers dropped out during the 1985-86 school year, an average of 3,789 dropouts a day over 180 school days. A General Accounting Office report (1987) estimated that the overall dropout rate for students ages 16-24 has remained between 13-14 percent for the last 10 years. However, the dropout rate is higher among Hispanics, blacks, and economically and educationally disadvantaged youth; up to 50 percent of students in some inner city schools drop out. In a random sampling of sophomores in 1980, the Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education determined that by 1982 the following percentages of students had dropped out. (However, the dropout rates for Hispanics might be underestimated because Hispanics often drop out before the 10th grade):

Whites (non-Hispanic)	12%
Blacks	17%
Hispanics	19%
American Indians	28%
Asians	5%

Sources: OERI, Department of Education (1987) and Orr (1987).

Steinberg, et al. (1984) point out that students from homes where a language other than English is spoken drop out at a rate of 40 percent compared to a rate of 10 percent of students from homes where English is the only language spoken. This statistic indirectly suggests a very high dropout rate for LEP students.

The LEP Population

According to Oxford-Carpenter, et al. (1984), the number of LEP children ages 5-14 was estimated at 2.5 million in 1976, increasing to around 2.8 million in 1990, and reaching 3.4 million by the year 2000. Approximately 95.5 percent of the increase in the LEP child population between 1976 and 2000 will be from homes where Spanish is spoken. Most of the statistical data on LEP populations is based on language spoken at home or, in some cases, on actual language(s) spoken by individuals (see Marcias and Spencer, 1984). Consequently, these data should be seen as high estimates because not all people who speak a language other than English at home are limited English proficient. Thus, the dropout rates for various ethnic groups can only be used as indirect measures of dropout rates for LEP students.

Hispanics

The Hispanic population is composed of diverse ethnic groups which vary in degree of assimilation and English language proficiency; these differences appear to affect dropout rates (Velez, 1989). Based on U.S. Census Bureau (1988) data of 1985, 29 percent of Hispanics ages 18 to 21 were not enrolled in high school and were not high school graduates compared to 13 percent for non-Hispanic whites. Currently, among Hispanics aged 25 and over, only 51 percent have completed 4 years of high school or more compared to 78 percent for non-Hispanic whites. Hispanic dropout rates ranging from 45 percent to 62 percent have been reported in different states (Applebome, 1987).

American Indians

American Indians represent a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous group. Significant differences in socioeconomic status and educational attainment have been found among these groups. Generally, high school completion rates for American Indians are lower than those for whites; 56 percent in 1980 for Indians ages 25 and over compared to 67 percent for the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1988). According to the Center for Education Statistics (1983), almost 30 percent of the American Indians included in the sample dropped out between 1980 and 1982. Dropout rates of

up to 90 percent have been reported for American Indians in some regions (Steinberg, et al., 1984).

Asians and Pacific Islanders

In 1980, 75.3 percent of Asians 25 years old or over were high school graduates. However, Laotians had a graduation rate of only 31.4 percent and the Hmong a rate of 22.3 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 1988). The 1980 data most likely reflect educational levels attained before immigrating to the U.S., especially among Southeast Asian refugees. More recent data are necessary to determine current dropout rates for Asians.

Do Low Levels of English Proficiency Increase the Risk of Students Dropping Out?

As a group, LEP students, appear to be particularly at risk of not completing high school. Baratz-Snowden, et al. (1988) compare the performance in reading and mathematics of Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, other Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian children in grades 3, 7, and 11. Self-report by students of their competence in English was used as one measure. Little or no correlation was found between any of the achievement outcomes and frequency of use of a language other than English in the home. However, the researchers found that competence in English showed positive relationships with academic grades as well as with mathematic achievement at grades 7 and 11. That is, the higher the reported competence in English, the higher the academic grades and mathematical achievement were, without regard to language spoken at home. The researchers concluded, "It would appear that whether or not one comes from a home where a second language is frequently spoken is not the critical issue [in academic achievement], but rather the central question is whether or not one is competent in English" (p. iii). Although Baratz-Snowden, et al., do not address the issue of English language proficiency and dropout rates, it is known that good academic performance leads to lower dropout rates among Cuban and Mexican-American students (Velez, 1989). It appears that competence in English may be inversely related to dropout rates, at least among some Hispanic groups. High competence in English leads to good academic performance which, in turn, leads to lower dropout rates. This relationship between proficiency in English and academic achievement and dropout rates is probably true for other LEP students, although this remains to be studied. How important a factor competency in English is for LEP students, relative to other factors involved in dropping out, also remains to be studied.

What Factors Increase the Risk of Dropping Out?

The following factors may affect LEP students dropping out: their level of proficiency in English language skills; school environment such as school size, location, safety, and attractiveness; the socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the student body; programmatic factors such as curricular tracking and ability grouping, promotion policies and grade repetition, and language of instruction; teacher attitudes and expectations (Ochoa, et al., 1987); school socialization and alienation; "personal" reasons; and residential mobility.

- One major factor that appears to increase the risk of LEP students dropping out of school is their level of competence in English-language skills. Competency in English seems to be directly related to academic grades and mathematical achievement (Baratz-Snowden, et al., 1988), and these factors, in turn, are related to dropping out of school. Valdivieso (1986) suggests that competency in English may be a causative factor in deciding to drop out, particularly as limited English proficiency may contribute to grade retention.

- School size may influence the dropout rate. Large student bodies seem to create a less positive environment that promotes less social integration and less identity with the school (Pittman and Haughwout, 1987). Attrition rates for schools with more than 1700 students increase as the proportion of LEP students increases (Olsen, 1988). School size may reflect the socioeconomic status of the community, as large schools are often found in low-income areas.

- The low academic achievement of minority and low-income students has often been attributed to linguistic, cultural, and social disadvantages or differences they bring to school. Such assumptions may reduce teachers' expectations about the academic abilities of these students, who are then judged by lower standards and less challenged by teachers to produce rigorous academic work (Edmonds, 1984). This can create a cycle of low expectation followed by poor performance. Valdivieso (1986) mentions that one of the most common reasons given for dropping out of school is "bad grades."

- Social behavior in class may be a risk factor in dropping out of school. Valdivieso (1986) points out that one of the most frequent reasons reported by dropouts for leaving school was "not getting along with teachers."

- "Personal" reasons are those often reported by dropouts that are not directly related to the classroom. Hispanic females reported pregnancy as one of the most frequently given reasons for dropping out; marriage was also reported frequently by both males and females as a reason for leaving school. Other reasons frequently given for dropping out were employment and "not liking school" (Valdivieso, 1986).

- Residential mobility increases the probability that a student will drop out. Velez (1989) suggests that many Hispanic families tend to move often, and many of these families are limited English proficient. This also appears to be true of some Southeast Asian groups and other language minority groups. Frequent moves cause students to transfer between schools, which seems to have a negative impact on the students and results in a high dropout rate for such students.

Consequences of Dropping Out

The effects of dropping out on the individual and on society are not completely understood; however, the loss to both appears to be enormous. For the individual dropout, the consequences are reduced earnings and limited employment opportunities. There may also be an impact on the individual's psychological well-being (Ramirez and Robledo, 1987). For society, a dropout is most likely a potential burden because of loss in tax revenues, higher unemployment, and possible reliance on social welfare services.

The economic impact of the dropout problem is significant. For example, the loss in earnings and taxes based on projected attrition rates among 1982-83 ninth graders in Texas has been estimated at $17 billion (Ramirez and Robledo, 1987). Also, projected changes in the composition of the labor force indicate that over the next 15 years the percentage of whites (whose native language is English) entering the labor force will decrease, while minority populations (which include LEP persons) will increase (Johnston and Packer, 1987). Thus, to meet national labor needs in the 1990s, the country will require minority students to graduate from high school in increasing numbers with high levels of literacy and mathematical skills.

Students who are at risk of dropping out of school should be identified early by means of various intervention strategies and encouraged to graduate. Preventing dropout among LEP students represents a challenge because proficiency in English is an additional factor in establishing the degree to which they are at risk of dropping out. Effective dropout prevention programs for LEP students may require considering the English proficiency levels of these students.

What Is Being Done About the Dropout Problem?

Public dissatisfaction with public school education has led to a school reform movement focused on increasing academic rigor for students and upgrading standards for teachers. The report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk*, urged educators to focus on excellence in education and encouraged a school reform movement that addresses the needs of all students, including (although not emphasizing) at-risk students. However, the dropout rates and low academic achievement of many language minority students have caused many educators to focus on the effects of the school reform movement on at-risk students. As reliable, comprehensive dropout statistics are not yet available, it is very difficult to gauge the effects of the school reform movement on dropout rates for LEP students. Murphy (1989) claims that school reform measures have not had a significant impact on the dropout rate of minority students although he notes that the mathematics data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that Hispanic students are making steady gains in achievement at all levels. However, the Hispanic category is not equivalent to the LEP student category. Further, as those Hispanics (who are most likely to be academically weak) drop out, the remaining Hispanics tend to be academically stronger. Thus, the NAEP may only indicate that Hispanic students who remain in school are gaining in mathematics achievement.

Federal and State Responses to the Dropout Problem

Both the federal and state governments have responded to the dropout problem with various approaches and initiatives.

Federal Involvement

The School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Act of 1988 (Title VI of Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988) seeks to reduce the number of students who do not complete their education. Grants are provided to local educational agencies to establish programs:

- to identify potential student dropouts and prevent them from dropping out;
- to identify children who have dropped out and encourage them to return to school;

- to identify at risk students; and
- to collect and report information to local school officials on the number of dropouts and reasons for such dropouts.

The National Educational Longitudinal Study: 1988 (NELS: 88), funded by the Department of Education, follows the educational progress of a nationally representative sample of students from the eighth grade through high school, post-secondary school, and beyond. Reports will be issued every two years for eight years beginning in August 1989. The Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) has contributed funds to this study to ensure that additional data on language minority students are gathered.

State Involvement

Smith and Lincoln (1988) report on state-funded services provided to at-risk student populations as part of a survey of the impact of the education reform on at-risk youth. They developed a four-phase continuum representing the level of state response, which extends from awareness of the dropout problem to full-scale intervention/prevention programs. Thirty-six states were classified as being in the initial stages of awareness. The remaining 14 states were identified at the second stage of the continuum, which includes widespread awareness of the dropout problem and initial steps to identify preventive measures.

How Can At-Risk Students Be Identified?

Probably the most important element in a dropout prevention strategy is identifying a student at risk of dropping out of school. Another important element is identifying the type of student at risk: teenage parent, drug abuser, truant, academic underachiever, financially needy, or other type. In the case of a LEP student, the level of proficiency in English should be determined.

Methods and procedures for identifying potential dropouts vary among school districts. Much seems to be known about school-related and student-centered characteristics of at-risk students. Local school agencies can use this information to develop appropriate identification and intervention strategies. The following are some factors to consider in the development of an identification strategy, adapted from the Program for Educational Equity, University of Michigan (1986):

- the practicality of the identification strategy;
- the possible negative consequences of such identification on students' future opportunities and assurance that students' rights are recognized and protected;
- the timely identification of at-risk students to help expedite remediation and prevention of further difficulties; and
- a procedure for correcting possible misidentifications.

Most of the following dropout indicators have been taken from a report issued by the Florida Department of Education (1986). The typology has been adapted from Natriello, et al. (1984). There are five broad categories which include different risk factors. Any one factor is not a necessary predictor of leaving school; however, the more factors a student faces, the greater the risk of dropping out of school.

I. Lack of positive social relationships in school

two or more years older than peers
limited extracurricular involvement
inability to identify with peer group
friends all outside of school
socializing with drug users, delinquents, or persons who attempt suicide

II. Perception that the school program is irrelevant to their future

absenteeism/truancy/frequent tardiness
lack of definitive educational goals
feeling of alienation from school
failure to see the relevance of education to life experience
discrepancy between ability and performance

III. Insufficient opportunities for success in school

low proficiency in English
reading level not commensurate with grade level
poor grades
difficulty learning math skills
lack of basic skills
frequent changes of schools
retention in one or more grades

IV. Family factors outside of school

single parent home
financial distress
poor communication between home and school
siblings or parents who are dropouts

excessively stressful home environment
limited parental monitoring of student's activities
low parental expectations
dysfunctional family
few study aids present in the home
parents are migrant workers
language other than English spoken in the home

V. *Personality factors*

inability to tolerate structured activities
disruptive classroom behavior
poor social adjustment
difficulty relating to authority figures
health problems
experience of some form of emotional trauma
poor self-concept
excessive hours spent on a job
lure of more immediate gratification (outside jobs, wages, experiences, etc.)
above average or below average intelligence

An identification system based on a profile of at-risk factors (similar to those above) is used in one Florida school district. In this district, a committee composed of an educational specialist, a dean of students, a social worker, a police liaison officer, teachers, and counselors gathers and disseminates information on students at risk. The committee develops criteria for identifying potential dropouts; trains school personnel in identification methods; and maintains a computer database containing grades, attendance records, discipline records, and staff comments for students at risk of dropping out. To coordinate with junior high schools as well as to identify at-risk students, the checklists are distributed to the feeder schools of the local high school. Information contained in student profiles may also include attendance patterns, inappropriate or disruptive behaviors, financial hardship, teacher or counselor evaluations, contact with other social service agencies, medical conditions, grade repetition, level of achievement in math and reading, previous intervention or remediation efforts, history of delinquency or drug abuse, comments from parents, and language background and/or English language proficiency (Florida Department of Education, 1986).

Dropout Prevention Strategies and Programs

Students drop out of school most frequently at the high school level. Intervention, however, is warranted as soon as predictor factors identify students as being at risk. Once students are identified as limited English proficient, they should be offered special language services, such as ESL or sheltered English. Although LEP students may share many factors with other at-risk students, instruction in English language skills can be an important dropout prevention measure for these students.

Several approaches and program types that address the needs of at-risk students are summarized here. These approaches can be incorporated into comprehensive dropout prevention plans for local education agencies and may provide teachers with ideas for their own classroom activities. Many of these suggestions can be adapted to meet the needs of LEP students. Equally important, many of the suggestions stress the importance of collaborative efforts between schools and community businesses or service organizations as well as agencies that specifically serve young people, such as mental health centers and the juvenile justice system.

Counseling Approaches

Potential dropouts typically have low self-esteem. Counseling programs attempt to enhance students' self-esteem by making the school environment less hostile, thereby developing greater social and self-awareness in students. Because the severity of distress or alienation may vary among students, close coordination between these programs and local mental health agencies may be advisable. The following are strategies included in some counseling approaches:

Peer counseling -- students develop a sense of responsibility and usefulness. Peer counselors help other students to become self-aware and to develop their academic, social, and personal potential.

Teachers as advisers -- students are assigned to a teacher who provides guidance in academic and other school-related activities. This is a strategy used to reduce the sense of alienation experienced by many students, especially those enrolled in large schools. For LEP students, assigning teachers who know their languages may be particularly helpful.

Parent counseling -- parents receive counseling on how best to help their children overcome problems. Individual, family, or group counseling techniques may be used. As a parent involvement strategy, this can help integrate the students' home and school environments.

Student hotline -- a telephone counseling service staffed by professional counselors to whom students can direct questions about school or from whom they may receive guidance on personal problems. Night hours can serve for emergency situations. This strategy may best be coordinated through a local mental health agency.

Counseling/rap room -- an office or room in the school used exclusively for counseling and advising.

Group therapy -- used to help students gain self-esteem, accept other persons, and take responsibility for their actions.

Incentive and Tutorial Approaches

At-risk students may have low motivation to attend school regularly and may be chronic truants or have excessive absenteeism. Low motivation of at-risk students may also be reflected in low academic achievement and in social disengagement from the school community. Both low motivation and academic failure or under-achievement can be addressed by the following activities and strategies (Florida Department of Education, 1986):

Attendance incentives -- providing awards or prizes to students or homerooms with the most improved or best attendance. Another method is assigning potential dropouts to work in the attendance or administrative offices or as group leaders within the classroom to monitor and follow up on their group members' absences.

Achievement incentives -- encouraging low-achieving students to accept responsibility for their progress which is regularly monitored, recognized, and rewarded. Techniques may include meeting regularly with counselors, teachers, or administrators to review progress; systematic goal setting; and individual or group tutoring by parents, peers, computers or community members such as senior citizens, successful alumni, or career mentors.

Environmental incentives -- encouraging students to recognize the importance of attending school regularly and graduating as an integral part of attaining economic, career, and personal goals. Activities may include inviting successful alumni or role models to interact with and address at-risk students in assemblies, private conferences, or workplace settings. Organizing formal and informal activities with local universities or colleges may also be an effective strategy.

Social incentives -- organizing peer support groups to encourage commitment to school. Activities may include agreements between students to attend school regularly, provide academic assistance to each other, and encourage participation in extracurricular activities.

Work-related Approaches

Work-related issues, including economic necessity and career and vocational development, should be addressed to encourage at-risk LEP students to stay in school. Employment realism is an important focus point -- learning about potential jobs and their requirements. Several suggestions are provided below that enlist the support of local businesses and industries in dropout prevention efforts.

Career education -- comprehensive programs that provide career awareness development at the elementary level, career exploratory activities at the junior high school level, and placement and follow-up at the senior high school level. Implementing such a program entails assessing student needs and talents, developing individual student career guidance plans, establishing timelines, providing career activities, and integrating with the regular academic curriculum. Parental involvement is necessary since parental approval and encouragement affect students' career plans.

Business community-school collaboration -- programs in which local businesses sponsor individual elementary, junior, or senior high schools or help them implement learning activities by sharing expertise and providing needed supplies. Students may become involved in the host businesses through volunteer work and special events.

Career shadowing -- programs that allow students to observe sponsors who work in the fields that represent the students' career interests. Students learn firsthand the requisite skills, training, and education for their career choices.

Career fairs -- programs where local business or industry representatives display information to students learning about their career choices. A related activity is a job fair in which recruiters from these businesses provide high school seniors with experience in interviewing and job hunting.

Alternative Curriculum Approaches

The alternative curriculum approach is based on the observation that many at-risk students appear more likely to drop out if they continue in a regular school environment. Differences between regular and alternative school environments center around students' learning styles, experiential versus traditional learning opportunities, or thematic orientations in the curricula.

School without walls -- instruction may take place at different locations around the community. Academic courses are modified to allow credit for mastering course objectives in a work or other out-of-school setting.

Environmental programs -- emphasis is placed on physical, experiential learning, and survival activities to build confidence and motivation. Strategies used are basic skills instruction, community involvement, student volunteer programs, study-travel experiences, survival trips, and interdisciplinary coursework.

Behavior modification programs -- these are often designed for chronically misbehaving or disruptive students. Strategies used include frequent feedback on student academic performance and behavior, reality therapy, self-discipline, and goal setting.

Theme schools -- curricula centered around themes such as sports, art, space, or animals. Teachers plan as teams and develop interdisciplinary units of study that teach academic concepts and skills by relating them to the particular school theme.

Dropout Prevention Programs for LEP Students

The following dropout prevention programs presented here are examples of programs found across the country that integrate some of the strategies described above.

Ysleta Pre-kindergarten Center, El Paso, Texas

This program addresses the needs of four-year-olds from non-English speaking families. The school district devotes one entire school, which has an adult-student ratio of 1 to 11, to pre-kindergarten children. The program emphasizes five areas of development:

- awareness of language as a means of communication (which includes initial instruction in English);
- use of the five senses to observe the environment;
- development of motor skills;
- expression of creativity through art, music, and drama; and
- social-emotional development by building confidence and self-esteem.

The center has an extensive parent education program which includes parenting classes. Free classes in conversational English are also available to all parents (CED, 1987).

Bilingual Cluster Concept, San Antonio, Texas

This program serves LEP students in grades K-5. It is a full-time program of dual language instruction that teaches basic skills while students become proficient in English. There are six cluster centers to which students are transported; the LEP population at the cluster schools makes up a small percentage of the total enrollment at the schools. The students remain in the program for an average of one year. Students are referred to the centers on the basis of test results (Texas Education Agency, 1988). One salient feature of this program is its focus on the learning of English. Thus, it addresses an important risk factor, a student's level of English proficiency, at an early age.

Valued Youth Partnership, San Antonio, Texas

This is a cross-age tutoring program designed for middle and high school at-risk students. This program is a public/private partnership supported by Coca-Cola USA in collaboration with the Intercultural Development Research Association. At-risk students are referred by counselors, teachers, and school principals. High school students tutor junior high students for 4 to 5 hours per week during a designated class period. Tutors receive minimum wage for all tutoring activities as an incentive to participate.

The program has nine components that are considered critical for program success (Sherman, et al., 1987):

- early identification of participants,
- personal and individualized instruction,
- basic skills remediation;
- support services and counseling;
- contact with the home;
- paid work experience;
- credit towards high school graduation; and
- committed staff.

The Valued Youth Partnership program has reduced the dropout rate among its participants. The model can be modified to meet the special needs of LEP students with English-language services supplementing basic skills remediation.

Newcomer High School, San Francisco, California

This is a transitional program for LEP students ages 14 to 17. Students receive intensive instruction in English for four periods a day and bilingual support classes in

content areas, such as social studies and mathematics, for two periods. In the bilingual support classes, the home language of the students is used, although for students speaking certain languages all of the instruction is in English. The students remain at the high school for a maximum of two years, after which they transfer to an all English-medium high school or community college program. The dropout rate of students while at Newcomer High School is only 1 percent (OERI, 1987).

Educational Clinics, Washington State

The state of Washington funds nine educational clinics designed to provide short-term educational intervention services to young dropouts. In addition to basic academic skills instruction, the clinics provide employment orientation, motivational development, and support services. The clinics provide services by individually diagnosing instructional needs and setting a course that can be followed at the student's own pace. Basic skills are taught in small groups or individually. Students are encouraged to either return to school or take the GED test and then continue their education or employment. One clinic serves the needs of American Indian dropouts. (GAO, 1987)

Recommendations

The LEP student population is highly heterogeneous. From indirect measures, it appears that many LEP students are at high risk of not finishing school. Moreover, the number of LEP students in grades K-12 will probably continue increasing throughout the next decade. Unless appropriate intervention measures are taken, the dropout rate among LEP students will continue to be high. For reasons stated earlier, it is not in the national interest nor in the interest of LEP students for such a situation to continue. Recommendations are of two types: those addressing research questions and those addressing policy issues. Although many questions remain about the relationship between LEP students and dropout rates, sufficient information exists to develop education policy. The following recommendations are compiled from recent studies:

- each state formulate guidelines for a standard approach to measuring student proficiency in English (Baratz-Snowden, et al., 1988);

- each local education agency use a standard approach to the identification of dropouts (OERI, 1987);

- research be undertaken to clarify the correlation between levels of English proficiency and dropping out among language minority students (Steinberg, et al., 1984);

- longitudinal studies be undertaken to determine predictors of success and failure in the school system so that dependable predictors for dropping out are available for students of all ages (Dougherty, 1987);

- students identified as having limited proficiency in English be given special language instruction (OERI, 1987);

- intervention programs be established at the earliest school level possible -- at the elementary grades if not earlier (Sherman, et al., 1987);

- the number of bilingual/multicultural counselors be increased at all school levels, especially the middle school level (Valdivieso, 1986).

Conclusion

Because of immigration, among other factors, the proportion of youths leaving school in the next decade who belong to language minority groups will increase considerably. Students who are not proficient in English are at greater risk of dropping out of school. Thus, the portion of the youth population that will grow the most in numbers is also the one most at risk. It is important to develop programs to prevent students from dropping out. Federal and state projects address the problem of at-risk students who come from a language minority background; there is also growing recognition among educators of the dimensions of the problem. The costs of preventing dropouts are small relative to the potential losses engendered by dropouts. Additional research is required because it is not clear why some language minority groups have very high dropout rates while other groups have very low rates. The dropout problem among language minority students is now recognized as an enormous problem; educators, with the help of researchers, business leaders, family members and others, need to build on the information now available to begin to solve the problem.

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